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HANDLED SHOULDER JARDINIÈRE

—Courtesy Fulper Pottery Company, Flemington, N. J.

Vasekraft—An American Art Pottery

By EVELYN MARIE STUART

POTTERY, perhaps more than any other branch of aesthetics, offers to art its best opportunity for getting close to the hearts of the people. A bit of pretty glazed earthenware is not beyond the purse of the majority of beauty lovers and it adds a friendly warmth to a room, possessing as it does the three graces of being intimate, pleasing and clean, to say nothing of being at once useful and ornamental.

Interest in this fascinating fabrication was never at a higher point, either with producers or collectors, than it is here and now, which is a good thing in many ways, for it tends toward the encouragement of art and the enrichment of the home. Pottery is one of the most flourishing of our native arts today, many American productions having gained favor throughout the world.

New ventures are appearing constantly upon the scene, some of them the mere crude experiments of amateurs, others the ripe result of years of study and experiment upon the part of experts, but all of them desirable, suggesting some home niche wherein they might shine in the beauty of usefulness.

It was comparatively recently that a new variety began to attract unusual attention from lovers of ceramics, with its wonderful heavy glazes, mottled and streaked like old Flambé, or shimmering, lizardlike in crystalline effects. In this new pottery, known as Vasekraft, we have come into something rich and brilliant, vibrant with splendid color, yet so mellow of tone and so graceful of line as to seem restrained and restful. It is the ideal of pottery, having gained in beauty from its frank expression of its origin, for, of all ornamental glazed



MUNCHNER BEER SET IN MUSTARD MATTE GLAZE

—Courtesy Fulper Pottery Company, Flemington, N. J.

ware, this is perhaps the most truly eloquent of the soil, without a trace of the artificiality of china or porcelain. It is most purely pottery, molded in lines made classic in clay and adorned only by its rich glazes in patterns traced by the fingers of fire.

One of the most distinguishing features of Vasekraft is the excellent taste displayed in its substantiality, which at once proclaims it as pottery making no pretense to a semblance of more delicate wares. Another distinctive feature is the individuality of each piece, no two being colored, spotted or streaked exactly alike, and yet another potent and enduring charm is the beauty, depth and richness of its many colored glazes.

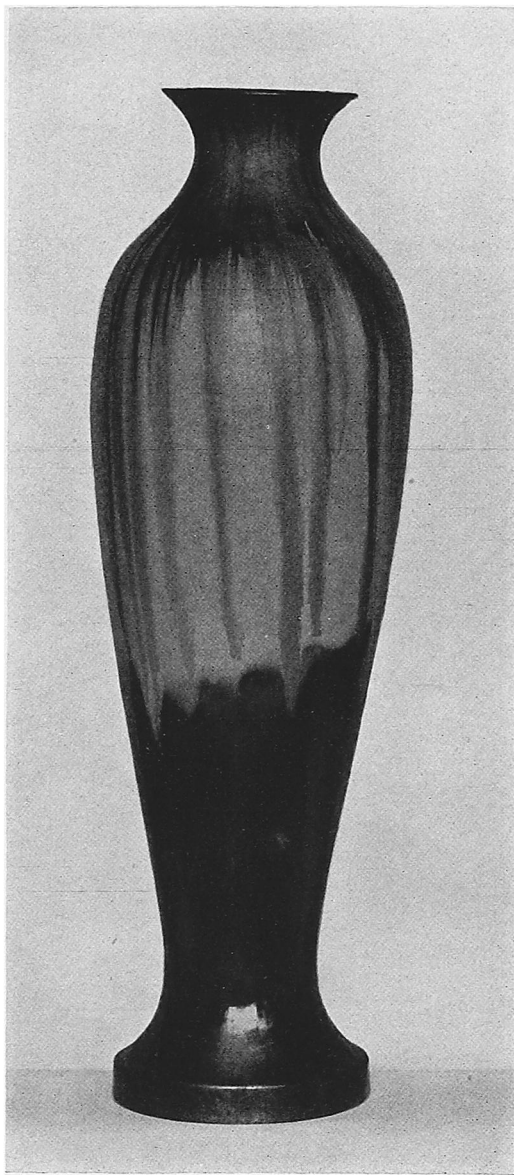
There is about it the all-pervading witchery of Nature herself, who does, indeed, collaborate with the potter, since however he may plan, it is the clay and fire that will, after all, decide the color, marking and surface effect of the finished piece. Here is the secret of the ever-fresh fascination of Vasekraft, for Nature is never twice alike and always pleasing.

Two things in the manufacture of this art ware have been considered to insure this co-operation of Mother Nature, the first, a use of impure clays, in which her own mixture of minerals has not been too much disturbed; and second, the perfection of the pieces at one firing, body and glaze maturing together in one fierce heat. The use of natural clays, not overrefined, gives an element of the unexpected, for the glaze "steals" from the body in firing, particles of mineral in the body producing variations of color or crystalline effects in the glaze.

This explains why a flock of little Vasekraft bowls molded and glazed alike, and fired at the same time and in the same kiln, display as great a variety of markings as a litter of puppies or kittens, the different traits of their common ancestor, Mother

Earth, cropping out in each in unexpected combinations.

The method of manufacture of this pottery is quite different from that of other art wares in the one firing of body and glaze. It is the more usual method to fire the pieces in biscuit, or simple clay form, at a very high temperature and, after applying the glaze, to fire again at a lower heat. This



TALL AMPHORA

—Courtesy Fulper Pottery Company,
Flemington, N. J.



HANDLED JARDINIÈRE—ONE OF THE MOST POPULAR SHAPES IN VASEKRAFT

—Courtesy Fulper Pottery Company, Flemington, N. J.

method produces a body of greater hardness than the surface glaze. With Vasekraft, however, the bodies are merely dried by mild heat, after which the glaze is painted on like a wet slip and allowed to dry. Then the firing takes place, bringing both body and glaze to perfection at one operation and amalgamating them in a complete unity impossible of achievement otherwise. This accounts for the almost volcanic appearance of many of the pieces, resembling some of the rare mineral specimens of igneous rocks turned out from the laboratory of Nature in the days when the earth was a molten ball.

It is difficult to describe the beauties of Vasekraft because they are as various as

a series of mountain sunsets or the ever-changing hues and undulations of the sea. There are wonderful velvety wistaria tones, ripe and asheen with bloom like the surface of a plum; brilliant yellows; mirror blues as rich as lapis lazuli; dull chocolates with a soft metallic gleam; cucumber greens and browns, spotted and mottled with crystal; combinations of color that rival the butterfly's wings or the exotic hues of the luxurious orchid.

Then there is a wonderful sange de boef as rich as any ever achieved by the potters of the Celestial Empire, and a marvelous little group of famille rose pieces in perfect old Chinese forms. These latter are

the treasures of the potter, held above price by their loving creator.

Not only in color, but in quality of crystallizations, there is the widest range of changes imaginable in Vasekraft, for both matte and mirror glazes are successfully achieved and deep and surface crystals appear to lend further variety, while the streaking and running of two kinds of colors or glazes into each other results in effects that can never be duplicated. Sometimes crystallization will take place at one or a few points only upon a piece, marking it with an unstudied pattern of starry frost flowers or giving one vivid spot of contrasting color sinking into the background of the general tone.

Different methods of firing, too, enlarge the possibilities of beauty, for a quick heat matures different effects from those produced by a more gradual one and others still are achieved by firing first rapidly then

slower. Crackled glazes are produced in these variations of firing, either accidental or planned, while splendid results are reached with flowing glazes applied in different colors and quantities to the pieces and allowed to spread in horizontal or perpendicular flow.

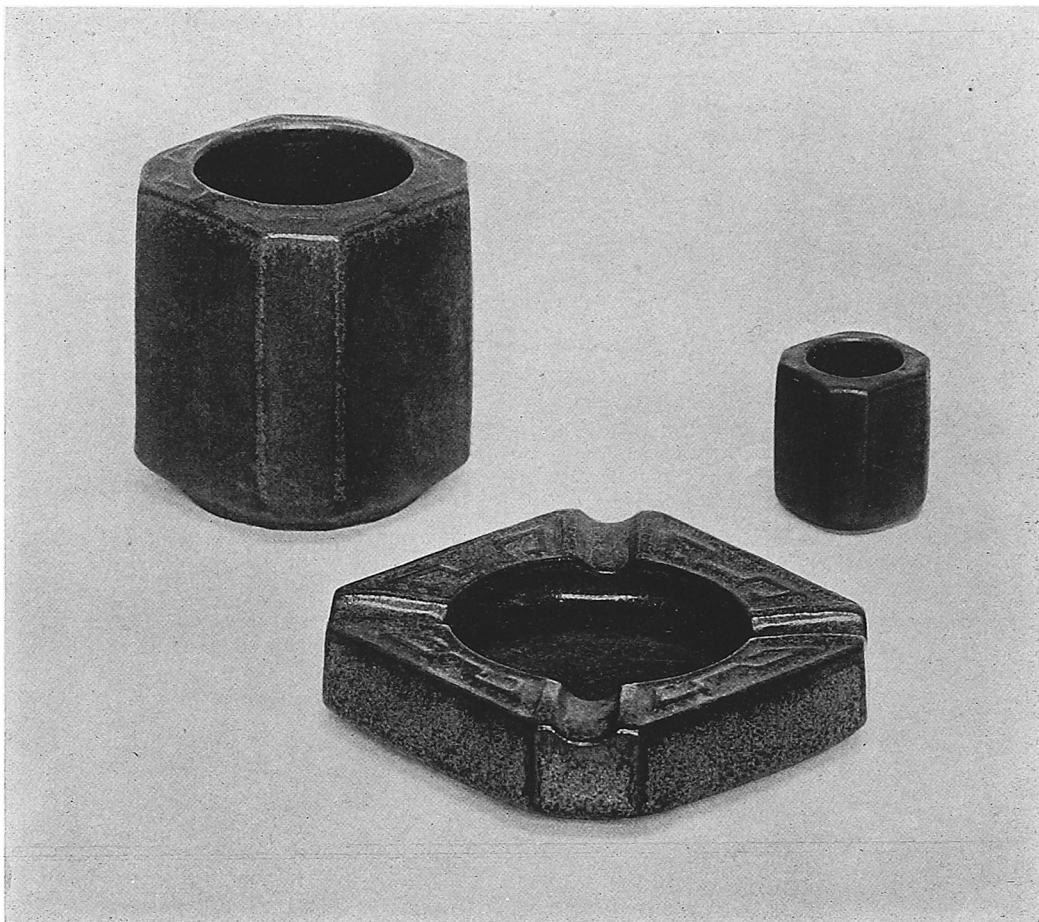
Not only in variety of beauty, however, but in variety of purpose as well, has Vasekraft taken a step in advance of most other forms of pottery, for it has been used effectively not only in vases, steins, mugs, flagons and tea sets, but in lamps, lampshades, lighting fixtures, automobile lights and horns. Its use in lamps is perhaps its strongest individual characteristic in the eyes of the general public, or rather that portion of it which appreciates things artistic to a sufficient extent to become familiar with new forms as they appear.

The Vasekraft lamp, indeed, has caught the eye and claimed the fancy of many a

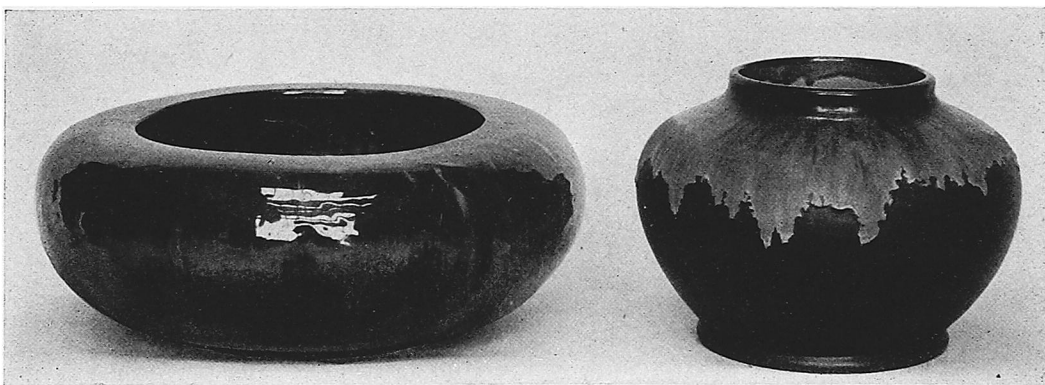


DESK SET—LAMP, STAMP BOX, CANDLESTICK AND CLOCK MISSION STYLE GLAZE

—Courtesy Fulper Pottery Company, Flemington, N. J.



SMOKER'S SET—CIGAR BOWL, ASH TRAY AND MATCH HOLDER—MISSION MATTE GLAZE
—Courtesy Fulper Pottery Company, Flemington, N. J.



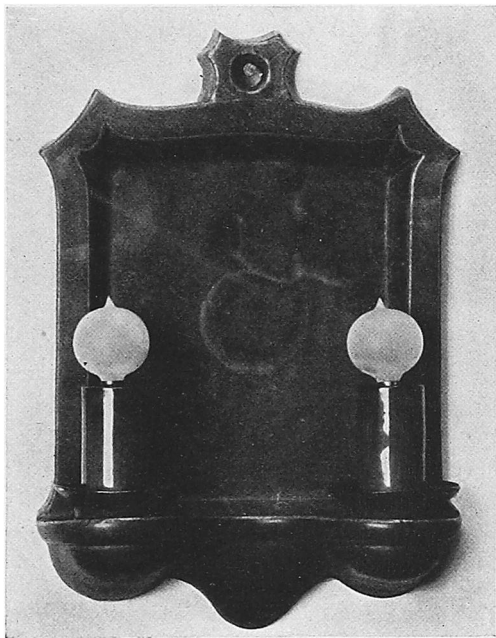
OVoid BOWL—MUSTARD MATTE WITH BROWN AND BLACK FLAMBE LILY BOWL—MUSTARD
MATTE WITH LEOPARD SKIN
—Courtesy Fulper Pottery Company, Flemington, N. J.



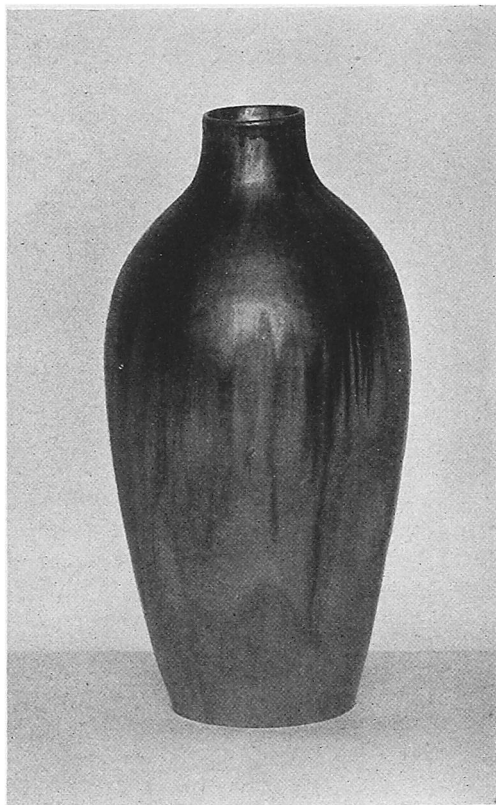
ROSE BOWL
—Courtesy Fulper Pottery Company,
Flemington, N. J.



WALL LUMINARIE
—Courtesy Fulper Pottery Company,
Flemington, N. J.



WALL LUMINARIE
—Courtesy Fulper Pottery Company,
Flemington, N. J.



TALL OVOID VASE
—Courtesy Fulper Pottery Company,
Flemington, N. J.



CHINESE PEAR SHAPED LAMP

—Courtesy Fulper Pottery Company, Flemington, N. J.

casual observer who might have passed by the lovely vases and more usual pottery forms unheeding. For the Vasekraft lamp is possessed of a beauty not to be escaped or ignored by anyone with a normal love of things lovely. It is not only exquisite, but odd, strikingly different from anything hitherto attempted or achieved, for both base and shade are of the thick opaque, heavily glazed pottery. Set into the shade, however, are designs of opalescent glass, glowing like jewels when illumined from within and forming pleasing color contrasts and harmonies when seen in the daytime unlighted.

There is just enough of translucence afforded by the colored glass insets for decorative effect and contrast of fabric, while

the rest of the inner surface of the shade being opaque and reflecting the light downward, renders the lamp more effective for lighting purposes than are those in which the entire shade is translucent. For overhead domes these pottery offerings are replacing the leaded glass wherever taste prevails and purse permits. Lately, too, they have been adopted for indirect lighting where they have proven the most unique and appropriate fixture that has ever been devised for use with this new scientific system of illumination.

Like all potteries wherein the genius of art presides, the Vasekraft institution has experimented successfully with artistic tiles, for modern methods of building offer alluring opportunities for the use of these delightful ceramic borders or pictures. Vasekraft has added to the riches of tiling with a new treatment

known as Cloisenamic, a name which, while it suggests the idea of the decoration, perhaps requires some further comment. In the making of Cloisenamic tile the original body or biscuit is honeycombed with the design laid out in sunken spaces with raised outlines, similar to the metallic network which is to be filled in with enamels in the making of Cloisenné. This sunken design upon the tile is filled in with the colored glazes, producing an effect much like that of old moorish tiles of the fourteenth century which were designed and invented to take the place of more costly mosaic. The Vasekraft method of manufacture is here more practical than any other, for in tiles thus made with two firings, the glaze being softer

than the body, it would be necessary to allow the outlines of the design to extend above the sunken glazed portions to protect them from the wear of constant footsteps. When body and glaze are fired at one operation, incorporating them into a single substance of great hardness, the colored glazes may extend to the top of, or even cover the raised outlines, giving something like the smooth surface of the Cloisonné from which these tiles are named.

The home of Vasekraft is as interesting as the ware itself—an ideal birthplace for an art production, sylvan and quiet, a fit resort for the muses. Though only a short distance from the most truly metropolitan of our great cities, it, somehow, seems remote both in spirit and in fact from every thought of the fretting torrent of life with its froth of artificiality just across the Hudson River.

It is surrounded by the gently rolling hills and soft green meadows of a quiet New Jersey landscape, which, somehow, make one feel that it does not matter that art is long and forget that time is fleeting. Here indeed is the repose of atmosphere in which things grow quietly and gradually but unswervingly and unerringly toward perfection.

The pottery is the oldest in the United States, dating from 1805, when it was a crude manufactory of red earthenware, field tiles and salt-glazed crockery. In the designing room one can still see the heavy old, hand-hewn timbers supporting the roof, with the marks of the axe upon them, and note how the structure is held together with wooden pegs after the staunch but primitive methods of early builders.

The pottery is not unlike its country, which first produced a sturdy race, simply and honestly fashioned for the rough and necessary purposes of life and later a glittering aristocracy, emerging from the mass as wealth and culture made it possible. Pottery itself, indeed, is singularly human, for the vase of famille rose and the brown pitcher of the ten-cent store, like the "Colonel's Lady and Judy O'Brady are sisters under the skin"—or rather glaze, in this case, made of exactly the same clay and beneath the same roof. It is only in externals, after all, that they differ, and yet, what a difference it is!

The more delicate outlines, the beauty and varied interest of that surface polish, reflecting all that is fine and wonderful be-



LARGE CLEAN STEM ELECTRIC LAMP

—Courtesy Fulper Pottery Company, Flemington, N. J.

neath, how they bespeak refinement and taste, working through long periods of time, whether they appear as bearing and manners in a human being or as form and glaze in a lesser vessel of earth.

Perhaps it is this "humanness" that has made pottery, and especially Vasekraft, which is most essentially pottery, so well beloved, so much admired, and so worthy of study.



LOW FUNNEL LAMP

—*Courtesy Fulper Pottery Company, Flemington, N. J.*